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IN OBSERVANCE OF WILLIAM R. STEWART'S RETIREMENT FROM THE NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD

"A TRIBUTE"

Delivered by:

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Chairman
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The Mansion on "O" Street
2020 O Street, N.W.
Washington, DC

This is the toughest of all speeches that I've given these past three years of my Chairmanship -- and perhaps the most difficult one ever. Tomorrow, before I testify again before the House Appropriations Subcommittee and depart for sunny Florida, will be my last working day with my "right arm" and *alter ego* Bill Stewart.

Last week at the Agency's "in house" party for Bill, one of the Board's brightest lights, Linda Sher, said to me: "Bill, how can you be smiling at a time like this?" I hope that I can keep smiling tonight -- and I can only repeat tonight what President Clinton said on March 10 in response to questions about his calm demeanor when queried by the press about the FBI and the White House: "What I seem and what I feel may be two different things."

I have had to do a good deal of that these last three years. Serving with Bill Stewart has been the major factor in bringing me through the storm this far.

This ceremony honoring my good friend and wise counsellor, Bill Stewart, is a highlight of my three years here in Washington, as well as my professional life. As I said last week at our ceremony at the Board and on a previous occasion honoring Bill, this is just one of a series of events in which I hope the memorable attributes of this extraordinarily outstanding man and role model will become known to everyone within earshot; more about that later.

Serving both in and outside of the Agency these past 36 years, I have had a lot of contact with the National Labor Relations Board and its representatives in a wide variety of capacities and contacts. In all of those years there has never been an individual that I have encountered to rival Bill Stewart's commitment to excellence -- a devotion which is combined with managerial acumen and great legal ability, as well as just plain common sense and understanding of people.

Bill has had a wide variety of jobs at this Agency and he has set the very highest standards for himself and for those with whom he has been associated. Those here tonight who know him so well understand that that is just half the story.

The other part of it is that Bill is a good and compassionate person, and speaking from personal experience, the best friend that it is possible to have in these few years of life that we have on this earth. He lives up to the role of counsellor -- and I mean counsellor in the old sense of the word.

Bill earned a Bachelor of Arts degree, with High Honors, from Indiana University and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He went on to graduate from Indiana University School of Law with a Doctor of Jurisprudence, with Distinction, and was elected to The Order of the Coif. After a stint with the United States Army in Europe -- he always reminds me of my asthmatic 4F status in rather non-euphemistic terms -- he then went on to serve with the Atomic Energy Commission prior to joining the Board in 1963. It was in 1963 that I came to know Bill.

We became good friends in that warm summer-like September that somehow seemed less oppressive than these past three Washington humidity waves. And these past four years have intensified that relationship as we have faced a host of wild and turbulent storms set off by some very wild and turbulent people within and without the Agency!

I say four years and not three years because Bill and I began to speak on the telephone very frequently in the spring of '93 when it became apparent that President Clinton would nominate me.¹ It became immediately apparent to me from our first conversations four years ago and the stream of materials that arrived in my office from Bill, that he knew the workings and inside secrets of this Agency very well indeed. So, it seemed only natural that I would offer him the Chief Counsel position as soon as I knew that the President would make me Chairman.

There then followed the confirmation process which seemed like an interminable wait. And there were the many visits to Washington, with Bill always faithfully waiting for me at the airport, taking me back to his home and driving with me as we went to see members of the United States Senate, and representatives of the Administration. Incidentally, it was here that I discovered another side of gentle Bill Stewart as we rushed to our next appointments in his car, "Dammit woman" -- or "buster", he would say, "get out of the way" exclaiming as he banged his hands against the car driving wheel while we rushed frantically so as not to be late.

When I offered the job to Bill, he explained to me that he had planned to retire within the next year and, after much reflection, he said: "I'll give you three years -- but after that I will retire." I snapped up his acceptance immediately, all the while hoping that he would reconsider and serve with me as long as I was Chairman. Alas, Bill has advised me that he had to stick by our initial deal and that the time has come for him to retire.

This past Sunday, during one of my many evening and weekend telephone conversations with Bill in which we discussed the Agency and all manner of problems in life, we talked about some comments that I had made that were quoted in *The Washington Post*. Said Bill in his most theatrically severe voice: "Mr. Chairman, have your colleagues" -- with special emphasis upon that word 'colleague' -- "authorized you to say these things?"

¹ Quoting the late Herb Caen from the *San Francisco Chronicle* of May 4, 1993: "You can bet the farm on this: Stanford law professor William Gould as next chairman of the National Labor Relations Board." (Stanford is known as "The Farm.") But no offer was made to me for another three weeks -- and the nomination did not come until June 28.

There are so many things that my association with Bill will remind me of him over the years:

- That special theatrical sarcasm which comes out in his frequent references to my “colleagues”;
- The uproarious laughter that comes bellowing out of his office — a phenomenon made even more formidable when Al Wolff is there. Al can rival Bill in sheer volume but *no one* is equal to Bill’s merriment and mirth;
- Bobby Knight, Indiana Hoosier basketball madness and, indeed, his love for “roundball” itself which is even ensnared and entrapped with Washington’s hapless Bullets. But what happened to Indiana this year, Bill? And how about that Stanford Cardinal!;
- Any reference to certain well known black labor lawyers who are affiliated with the Republican Party;
- A feigned look of puzzlement when anyone -- just *anyone* -- refers to Harvard University as the Stanford of the East;
- A discussion of religion including even the Book of Common Prayer will produce the most animated of Bill Stewart responses -- though I fear, Bill, that what you possess in animation you may not always equal in knowledge. This, I am sure is one of the areas in which Bill plans to take courses in his retirement.

“Chiefie baby,” I have always called him -- inspired by Justice Thurgood Marshall’s name for Chief Justice Burger as described in *The Brethren*. The context though is entirely different. Justice Marshall used the appellation with the Chief Justice because of his alleged stuffiness. With Bill, it has always been the exact opposite!

The enduring legacy of this Agency lies not in the imperfect law which we administer -- we know that it needs to better implement the Act’s objectives and, yes, Bill, I will have the courage in part due to your inspiration to continue to say that -- but rather its strength lies in its unyielding commitment to excellence in public service exhibited by so many of its first-rate career civil servants. Bill Stewart’s life and work here, an unrivaled record at all levels of the Agency, best symbolizes that tradition.

This is why President Clinton, in a letter sent to Bill this afternoon, has stated that his commitment at the Board is "unparalleled" in its history. I want to quote fully from the letter:

Dear Bill:

Congratulations on your retirement after 38 years of federal service. In your most recent position as Chief Counsel to NLRB Chairman William B. Gould IV, you have served ably as the principal legal advisor to the Chairman providing thoughtful counsel on a range of issues.

From your early days at the Atomic Energy Commission to your first position at the NLRB as a legal assistant on the staff of former Chairman Frank McCulloch to your service as Chief Counsel, you have met the highest standards of public service. America's tradition of hard work has made our country strong, and you can be proud of your contribution to that legacy. Your dedication to the public, is an inspiration to others. Indeed, your commitment to excellence at the Board is unparalleled. On behalf of all those who have benefited from your service, I thank you for a job well done.

Hillary and I wish you good health and every future success.

Sincerely,
Bill Clinton

And, Bill, I have it on good authority from the White House that we are going to be hearing more from them about their appreciation for your good work at some point during the coming weeks or months. So, everyone, including Bill, stay tuned!

All of the people of the United States have benefited from Bill Stewart's dedication and his outstanding abilities. We salute Bill Stewart for holding the Board's banner so high. And I salute him for a job well done and thank him from the bottom of my heart for his loyal friendship and sagacity.

And, Bill -- good-bye old friend. The Agency, labor-management relations community, the Nation and the White House, thank you. I and they wish you -- if we may be so presumptuous to use this word with someone of your firm persuasion -- Godspeed in the years to come.

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